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His Father's Son

Hellen Morrison Howie

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HIS FATHER'S SON

A Farce Comedy in One Act

BY HELLEN MORRISON HOWIE

Author of "After the Matinee," "The Reformer Reformed," etc.

Philadelphia

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HIS FATHER'S SON

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOSIAH SMITHKINS	<i>A Widower</i>
JOE	<i>His Only Son</i>
MISS JANE ANN TUBBS	<i>Josiah's First Love</i>
PEARL	<i>Her Niece</i>

COSTUMES MODERN

TIME IN REPRESENTATION, ONE HOUR

HIS FATHER'S SON

SCENE—*Cosy and homelike interior, half dining, half sitting-room; door in flat C., with transom; another door in R. front: directly opposite this doorway a fireplace L., with large wooden clock, photos and various objects (not of a fragile nature) on the mantelshelf; in front of the fireplace a table, with fancy cover, on which are placed some books, papers and a Japanese vase; near the end of this table L. C. stands a tall folding screen; partly under the table, at the opposite end from the screen and in view of the audience, there lies on the floor an envelope, such as are used in dry-goods stores, encasing a pair of black silk stockings; side-board R., sofa R. C., large easy chair and several smaller chairs disposed about the room.*

SMITHKINS (*rushing breathlessly into the room, shutting the door with a slam, and locking it*). Thank Heaven! I've found a refuge at last! Phew! Maybe I didn't have to run for it! Oh, that ungrateful boy! To think he could so deceive a doting father! Haven't I confided to him my financial difficulties? Haven't I talked it into him all his life that he was expected to retrieve the lost fortunes of our noble house by marrying money? And now—when he had only to say the word and win the heiress to old Huntley's thousands—he has gone and actually engaged himself to a ballet-girl! A flaunting, kicking, skipping, twisting, pirouetting hussy of a ballet-girl! (*Tragically.*) Fate! fate! have you any harder blow in store for me, if so (*throwing open his coat and slapping his breast*), strike now, for after this I can bear anything! Just to think how he has been fooling me all these months with his "Yes, Papa" (*accent on the last syllable*) and "No, Papa!" The young rascal! But my eyes are opened at last. To-day I received this anonymous letter. (*Produces letter and reads aloud.*) "Watch your boy. I know on very good authority that he intends marrying a certain Mlle. Rosa, a ballet dancer at the Criterion. Follow him when he leaves home to-day and you may see something that will open your eyes to the true character of your only son and heir.

(Signed) "A friend and well-wisher."

(*Returning letter to his pocket.*) Well, I followed—that is, for a while, but most of the time it seemed to me that I was running away from him. The young scamp would turn on his tracks as if he knew he was being shadowed and wanted to give as much trouble as possible. I thought I had found a safe retreat behind the door of this apartment house when, peek-a-boo, up he comes again, and this time not alone either, but accompanied by as pert-looking a bundle of dry-goods as you would wish to see—the ballet dancing minx of course! They were making for this very house. I made for the stairs. And here I am hiding like a sneak thief in a strange apartment (*looking about*), perhaps, the abode of some chaste, lone female! Awful thought! The gods forbid! (*Lifts a book from the table, reads the title aloud*) “How to Catch a Husband.” Ah! ’tis as I had feared! No married woman would buy that book. She knows how to catch her husband, and she’s always sure to catch him when he thinks he’s safest. (*Opens the book and reads aloud the written inscription on the title page.*) “To Jane Ann, from a friend.” I was once friendly with a Jane Ann myself. She was my first love. But a cruel father came between us. He put an end to the affair, and a head on me. Poor girl! where is she now? I wonder if she kept that piece of poetry I wrote her! (*Recites*)

Come, Jane Ann, where the birdlets sing
 Sweet carols to the budding spring;
 Come, Jane Ann, where the whispering breeze
 Murmurs love to the bending trees.
 Come! and get a “gait-on,” please,
 Before that crank, your father, sees!

Heigh-ho! poor Jane Ann! Josiah, my boy (*shaking his head*), I’m afraid you were a sad lady-killer in those days. No wonder Joe runs after the girls. He’s his father’s son all right. That reminds me. Where is that young sap-head now? The coast is surely clear by this time. I must make good my escape. (*Throws the book on the table.*) Good-by, Jane Ann! (*Some one knocks at the door; SMITHKINS in a panic, rushes about the room in search of a hiding place.*)

VOICE WITHOUT. Are you there, dear? Never mind about the doctor. Baby is better now. Oh, by the way! Hand me out my stockings, won’t you? I came away and forgot them.

SMITHKINS (*his curiosity getting the better of his caution, assuming a falsetto*). Your what?

VOICE WITHOUT. My stockings, of course, stupid! You've got them. Please be quick!

SMITHKINS (*aside*). I've got them, have I? (*Putting his hands to his head*.) I really begin to feel that way! (*Pulls up his trousers and examines his socks which are of a gorgeous plaid*.) No, no! Josiah, my boy! she can't fool you to that extent! (*Slapping his leg*.) These are your calf-protectors, Josiah—yours! (*Aloud*.) Misguided female! cease your babbling! I swear by every hair on my bald head that what you say is false! Go! go, I say—to your uncles!

VOICE WITHOUT. Pearl, please stop your fooling! I like a joke as well as any one, but to stand here in this draughty hall with nothing on but a bathrobe is no joke, I can tell you!

SMITHKINS (*aside*). In her bathrobe! Shocking.

VOICE WITHOUT (*sneezing*). Oh! I'm catching my death of cold! Can't you find them? They're in a flat-looking package. I think I left it on the mantelpiece.

SMITHKINS (*aside*). On the mantelpiece. (*Hurries towards it; falls over a chair; trying to save himself, pulls the cover from the table, rose jar, books, etc., fall to the floor with a crash*.)

VOICE WITHOUT (*with a scream*). Mercy! What have you broken?

SMITHKINS (*sitting on the floor and rubbing his shin*). My leg!

VOICE WITHOUT. Oh, is that all! I thought it was some of the china.

SMITHKINS (*rising; his face expressing the disgust he feels*). Oh, no, no! It wasn't the china! (*Kicking the broken fragments about the floor*.) Oh, no! no! (*Limps over to the fireplace*.)

VOICE WITHOUT. Well; have you got it?

SMITHKINS (*making havoc of the mantel; throwing the various small articles about the room*). No; I'm looking for it. (*Lifts the clock; a flat-looking package falls to the floor*.) Well, it takes a woman to hide things. (*Replaces the clock and lifts package*.) I've heard of clocks in stockings, but I never heard of stockings in clocks before!

VOICE WITHOUT (*Impatiently; pounding on the door*). Well?

SMITHKINS. I've got it! (*Unlocks the door and opens it a little; keeping himself well hidden, thrusts out the pack-*

age.) There! (*Quickly closes the door, but does not lock it.*)

VOICE WITHOUT. Oh, thanks! you dear old darling, you! Good-by!

SMITHKINS (*leaning with his back against the closed door and waving his hands*). Good-by—good-by! (*A pause, during which SMITHKINS rubs his shin, shaking his head as he ruefully surveys the dismantled appearance of the room.*) “Well, Josiah (*scratching his head*). So you sallied forth for adventure this morning, did you? You’re getting it!—oh—you’re getting it! (*Attempts to cross to the chair for his hat, intending to beat a hasty retreat, when the injured leg suddenly begins to act very queerly; first, it collapses entirely under his weight; then when its startled owner gets it straightened it insists on remaining in that position for some time, perfectly rigid; again, it is seized by an uncontrollable tremor, jerking suddenly to the right—then to the left.*)

SMITHKINS (*hopping wildly about the room, then sinking on the sofa*). A doctor! Quick—somebody help! My leg’s bewitched!

(*Enters MISS TUBBS, door c.*)

MISS TUBBS (*speaking as she enters*). Pearl, what is the meaning of this outrageous disturbance? Can’t I leave home for an hour or two without coming back to find—(*Sees Smithkins and screams.*)

SMITHKINS. Me, yes, I know. I didn’t intend you should, but you have. Sit down (*making room for her on the sofa*), and we’ll talk it over!

MISS TUBBS. Sit down! You bald-headed old reprobate. How dare you! Walk out of here this instant!

SMITHKINS (*rubbing his leg*). Just what I want to do—but can’t—

MISS TUBBS (*surveying the room*). What! Were you attempting to carry away my belongings?

SMITHKINS. No; I wasn’t carrying them away. I was throwing them away!

MISS TUBBS (*with an exclamation of horror at sight of the broken vase*). Oh, such vandalism! My rose vase! A gift that I have cherished since my youth!

SMITHKINS. So long! It was time it was broken.

MISS TUBBS. Such insolence! Sir, whoever you are you certainly have an unparalleled amount of assurance.

SMITHKINS. Oh, my assurance is all right. It’s my leg that’s weak. (*Attempts to walk; here the injured limb begins another series of performances; SMITHKINS hops about*

the room, cutting a ridiculous figure ; MISS TUBBS screams, interposing some article of furniture between herself and him every time he nears her vicinity.)

SMITHKINS. Sit down, woman! And keep still! It's bad enough to have one of us making a fool of himself! Oh! Oh! (*Throws himself on his back, kicking out the injured limb vigorously.*)

MISS TUBBS. Oh, if I were only well out of here! This man is certainly crazy!

SMITHKINS. I've got all the symptoms, I know, but I ain't! Oh, my leg! my leg! Pull it, will you?

MISS TUBBS (*horrified ; with a faint scream*). Oh! you—you abandoned old sinner, you!

SMITHKINS. What are you making such a fuss about? It wouldn't be the first time that a woman has pulled a man's leg.

MISS TUBBS (*aside*). If I could only reach the door.

(SMITHKINS *lies on the floor between her and the doorway ; gathering her skirts about her she attempts to pass him, but he kicks out in her direction, compelling her to retreat to her corner ; she makes a second attempt, almost reaching the doorway.*)

SMITHKINS. No, no! None of that! (*Jumping up and seizing her by the wrist*.)

MISS TUBBS (*struggling*). Help! Help!

SMITHKINS. Stop that noise! You'll arouse the whole neighborhood. Listen! I can explain my presence here. I'm no thief; I'm a respectable man!

MISS TUBBS. A respectable man! Do respectable men break into people's houses, smash up the furniture and assault the inmates? You a respectable man! No, sir; yours is the face of a hardened criminal!

SMITHKINS. Not quite so bad as that, I hope.

MISS TUBBS. Unhand me, I say! Pearl—somebody come! Quick! Help! help!

SMITHKINS. Madam, far be it from me to forget the courtesy due to a lady, but if you don't stop that at once I shall be compelled, in self-defence to silence you by force. Once for all—will you be still and listen to me?

MISS TUBBS. No, I will not be still! You may murder me but I will die fighting! (*They glare at each other ; as they look the expressions on their faces change ; SMITHKINS lets go his hold on the woman's wrist, falling back a step.*)

SMITHKINS (*aside*). Where have I seen that face before?

MISS TUBBS (*aside*). Those eyes! How strange! Who can he be?

SMITHKINS (*looking at her intently*). Can it be?—Yes—it is! Jane Ann!

MISS TUBBS (*startling back in horror*). Josiah! No—no! I cannot believe it! Josiah—a thief! Oh, this is too cruel!—too cruel! Oh! (*Falls into the chair in a faint.*)

SMITHKINS. Miss Tubbs! Jane Ann! for mercy's sake, don't do that! Here—smell this! (*Takes a cigar from his pocket and holds it under her nose.*) She always hated tobacco. Maybe the smell of it will bring her to. No use. Here's a pretty fix! What am I to do! What do people do when other people faint? Oh, I know!—unfasten her collar! She doesn't wear one. Tickle the soles of her feet! I hardly like to try that. Burn a feather under her nose! I'm a bird, I know, but I haven't grown any feathers yet. How would singed hair do? (*Feeling his bald head.*) No, no, Josiah! decidedly you haven't hair to burn. Water! Water! that's the thing! Cheer up, Jane Ann, I'll have you all right in a minute. I'll go in next door and ask the woman in the bathrobe to give me a bathtub full. (*With his hand on the door-knob.*) I'll—(*sound of voices without*)—no, I won't—for my son is speaking to some one out in that hall! My son!—Jane Ann—my son! Will you let that fact slowly percolate through the interstices of your befogged intellect? In other words, will you catch on, Jane Ann, and look a little more lively and evince some interest in current events? Listen! (*Speaking excitedly, getting down on his knees and taking her inert hand in his, jerking it as he speaks.*) My son is coming to this room. I know that because everybody comes to this room. Now it is important that he should not see me here. It's a long story—a family secret (*in a louder tone*), a secret! do you hear? It's no use! (*Dropping her hand and rising to his feet.*) She is certainly in a dead faint when that word doesn't affect her. What's to be done? (*Scratching his head.*) I can't afford to be discovered here alone with a woman in a faint. If she won't "come to" and "go to," then I must go do, that's all! And there's no time to waste, either. I will hide her—but where? (*Looks around.*) Ah! here is a door. (*Crosses to door, R.*) Let me investigate. A quiet room, a dark and secluded spot, where the noises from the outer world will not disturb her repose. Jane Ann, I'm sorry (*taking her under the arms and dragging her along*), but circumstances over which I have no control force me to the deed. The Fates are playing Rugby to-day and they're

using me for the ball! No wonder I feel light in the head! By the way, you're not so light, Jane Ann! You've covered your framework with many a pound of solid flesh since the days of your raw-boned youth, my dear. (*Voices without; SMITHKINS continues in a sarcastic aside.*) Yes, yes; this is the room. You've made no mistake. Walk right in. I'm getting ready for visitors. This is my reception day. There! (*Shuts the door on the unconscious female, seizes his hat and darts behind the screen.*)

(*Enter JOE and PEARL, laughing and talking; JOE has his arm about his companion's waist.*)

JOE. Poor old dad! If that bald pate of his didn't perspire this morning, I don't know what else it did! After tiring him out, I finally shook him. Wonder where he is now! (*SMITHKINS shakes his fist at his unsuspecting offspring.*)

PEARL. Some one has told him about your visiting here. And now he'll put an end to it all and we'll be separated, and maybe we'll never see each other again—never! think of that, Joe—never! Boo-hoo! (*Hides her face in her handkerchief.*)

JOE. Here! just postpone that a minute will you, until I light my cigarette? (*Lights it.*)

SMITHKINS (*aside*). Smokes does he? What next!

JOE. There now, little woman, lay your head right here (*pressing her cheek against his breast*) and listen to me for a minute. (*Pearl weeps noisily.*) Say, look out! Go easy, won't you! That coat was bought new this week. Well, as I was going to say—

PEARL. It's no use, Joe; I know it all!

JOE. You know it all, do you. No wonder I can't get a word in edgewise. Those people are always hard to talk to—the kind that know it all. Well, as I was going to say—

PEARL. Your father is a cruel, bad man, Joe, to wish to separate us.

JOE. Don't be too hard on dad, Pearl. You see the trouble is, father forgets that I am no longer the little five-year-old my poor dead mother left in his care. Now in this Adele Hart affair, he imagines he has only to say the word and I will instantly fall at her overgrown feet, and beg her, feet and all, but especially her money bags, to be mine.

PEARL. You marry that girl! The very thought of such a thing makes me ill!

JOE. Strange—it affects me that way, too. When I remember the clammy touch of Adele's flabby hand—when I recall the vague expression of her fishy eye—when I think of that fairy tread of hers—but especially, when I look at her mother and try to picture myself with that fire-eating old termagant for a mother-in-law, I feel ill—decidedly ill, and all old Huntley's thousands cannot cure my nausea. No, no, sweetheart, in this broad, free America we can afford to marry for love, and we're going to do it! Aren't we, my Pearline?

PEARL. Pearline! Do you take me for a washing compound?

JOE. No; but I'll take you for better or worse. And now, Pearl, no more secrecy! I will speak to my father this very day. Your aunt also must be told.

PEARL. Oh, that reminds me! Auntie has gone down town and won't be back until late. You will stay and have luncheon with me and we'll have a splendid—*(noticing for the first time the appearance of the room)*. Gracious! what has happened here?

JOE. Things do look rather upset, that's a fact. If this is a sample of your housekeeping, Pearl, I begin to tremble for my matrimonial happiness.

PEARL. That cat has gotten in here again! You know I told you when I met you that Mrs. Norton's baby had taken suddenly ill and that I had gone to telephone for the doctor. In my hurry I must have forgotten to close the door. How careless! Oh! *(picks up piece of the broken vase)* I'm so sorry! It was ugly enough, goodness knows, but auntie prized that vase more than anything else in the house.

JOE *(shaking his head)*. A mistake to set one's affections on the hollow things of this world.

PEARL *(playfully pushing him aside)*. Suppose you take yourself and your moralizing over to the other side of the room until I tidy up here. *(She lifts the different articles from the floor without remarking the dry-goods package, and arranges the mantel; the pieces of the vase she places on the sideboard, from the drawer of which she produces a linen table cover and sets the table for two.)*

JOE *(takes out another cigarette, nonchalantly puffs at it while he talks)*. Mistakes! How we keep on making them. For instance:

I

Men think they'll see the stage, now that the theatre hat is barred,

A mistake! A mistake!

They even think that women for men's feelings have regard,

A mistake!

Did Eve put off her bonnet? She has still her pompadour,
That frizzy, frowzy mass of hair with pins and combs
galore,

Is a more effectual "shutter off" than any hat she wore.

II

Those British yachtsmen thought our cup in need of change
of air,

A mistake! A mistake!

They said they'd come to take it back to Albion's shores so
fair,

A mistake!

Columbia quickly showed them what a Yankee craft could
do,

And they hied them home to Britain, a disappointed crew,
And methinks the cup will tarnish e'er they visit us anew.

III

A seven-and-a-half-a-week youth goes courting some fair
maid,

A mistake! A mistake!

Tries to give her the impression that in gold dust he can
wade,

A mistake!

She eats his high-priced dinners, wears his flowers to the
play,

(He'd borrowed money for the seats in town that very
day.)

But she weds the other fellow in the same old way.

IV

The new woman, some aver, is a menace to the race,

A mistake! A mistake!

That to herself she arrogates the all-important place,

A mistake!

Men may storm about and bluster, they may fume and fret
and stew,

Talk large of their authority and what they're going to do,
But women still will run them, whether she be "old" or
"new."

V

Out West they think that silver will do just as well as gold,
 A mistake! A mistake!
 They'd like to flood the country with quantities untold,
 A mistake!
 They tell us if we'd let them run the governmental show,
 There would be no more "expansion" and "trusts" would
 have to go,
 And the richest man around would be "the man with the
 hoe."

(These verses may be added to, the latest topic of the day forming subject for the rhyme; if for any reason it is thought best to omit them, JOE must fill in the time by helping PEARL to set the table, she calling for the various articles, he bringing them from the sideboard; some amusing by-play might be introduced.)

PEARL. It is all ready. Come now and have something to eat.

JOE. Nay; I'm above such sordid needs.

PEARL. Feeling ill?

JOE. No; happy! *(Here a song and a dance may be introduced; SMITHKINS joins in the dance, at its close darting back behind the screen just in time to avoid discovery.)*

PEARL *(seating herself at the table with her back to the fireplace.)* Well, if you refuse to keep me company—

JOE. Keep you company! I will go with you if need be to the grave! *(Seating himself opposite her at the table.)*

PEARL. I hope my cooking isn't so deadly as that.

JOE *(gulping down a mouthful)*. Almost! *(Holds out a plate of biscuits.)* Have a paper-weight?

PEARL *(waving it aside)*. For your sake I e'en will deny myself.

JOE. Pearl, don't tell me that you made them expressly for me! There's a limit to my endurance!

PEARL. You don't like biscuits? How would a ham sandwich strike you? Here is one. *(Offers it.)*

JOE. It wouldn't strike nearly so hard as the biscuit. *(Takes it.)* Thanks! *(Places the sandwich on the table at the end nearest the screen.)* But Pearl, I fain would taste of the nectar of your lips—a kiss!—just one!

PEARL *(laughing)*. You foolish boy! *(They rise from their chairs, and leaning across the table kiss each other; while they are thus engaged, SMITHKINS, standing on a chair*

back of the screen, leans over and helps himself to the sandwich.)

JOE. Ah! (*smacking his lips as he seats himself*). After such a relish even an ordinary ham sandwich—(*Looking about the table for it*) Say! where it is? (*To PEARL*) Did you take it?

PEARL. What?

JOE. That ham sandwich that I laid down here (*indicating the spot*) a minute ago.

PEARL. Not I.

JOE. Pearl, I don't appreciate the joke; for that ham sandwich was the only thing on this table that was fit to eat. (*They rise from the table.*)

PEARL (*laughing*). That may be; but I tell you I never touched it.

JOE. Let me look into your eyes. (*They gaze at each other approaching their faces quite close; SMITHKINS replaces the sandwich, out of which he has taken a generous bite.*)

PEARL. Well, are you satisfied? (*JOE shakes his head; PEARL approaches the table; sees the sandwich.*) Why that's strange! Here it is!

JOE. So I did hypnotize you into giving it up!

PEARL. Indeed! then that occult current of yours wasn't quite strong enough. For there is still a third of this sandwich missing. (*Holding it up.*)

JOE. By Jove, that is queer!

PEARL. Not at all; that bite just fits your mouth.

JOE. Pearl, I tell you I never—!

PEARL. Let us drop it!

JOE (*taking the sandwich*). Oh, no, no! I'll eat what's left. (*They resume their seats at table.*)

PEARL. And now, Joe, be serious. There is something of great importance that I wish to tell you.

JOE. Pearl, don't get that look in your eyes! Please, don't!

PEARL. First tell me—why do you wish to marry me?

JOE. Why? (*Gulps down a mouthful and sings*) "Because I Love You."

PEARL. I believe it. Now listen! You seem fated to marry Richard Huntley's heiress, for it is to me, and not to Adele Hart, that he has left the bulk of his fortune!

SMITHKINS (*aside; his eyes like saucers*). What is that I hear! I wish she'd say it over again!

JOE (*gasping*). You!—you—! (*Jumps to his feet, upsetting his chair.*) Oh! what a pain! what a pain! (*Rubbing*

his chest and walking about.) This on top of the biscuit is too much! Pearl, will you ever learn to have some consideration for my nerves?

PEARL (*amused*). When you feel well enough to listen I will continue.

JOE. Go on—go on! (*Resuming his seat.*) But give me your hand to steady me a bit. I'm all in a tremble! (*Shaking, and chattering his teeth.*)

PEARL. Do you remember the first time you saw me?

JOE. Perfectly; you were coming down the steps of the Huntley mansion. It was love at first sight. That settled it! I couldn't go in and see Adele that evening. You never knew it, but I followed you home.

PEARL. Joe!

JOE. I did, really.

PEARL. Who did Mrs. Hart and Adele say I was?

JOE. The daughter of some friend of old Huntley. They seemed rather put out when they heard that you had had a private interview with the sick man.

PEARL. And well they might! For I am his niece and only living relative!

SMITHKINS (*aside*). His niece! My brain begins to whirl.

JOE. Pearl, I can stand a good deal, but this is getting too much for me!

PEARL. Just a little more. It seems that Mrs. Hart, while in the capacity of housekeeper to my uncle, had gained such complete ascendancy over the old gentleman that she got him to draw up a will leaving the bulk of his fortune to her daughter, Adele. But Richard Huntley knew that his youngest sister had left a child that was probably living somewhere in this broad land, and the more he thought about that little niece of his, the more his conscience troubled him. Secretly, for he stood in perfect awe of his Amazonian housekeeper, he instituted a search which disclosed the fact that his niece was living within a few blocks of his own door. Satisfied as to my identity, he made another will, and, with the exception of five thousand to Adele and a small annuity to her mother, I inherit every penny of my uncle's wealth.

(*During this recital, SMITHKINS leans over the screen, his hand behind his ear, his mouth wide open, drinking in every word; JOE and PEARL are leaning across the table, their faces turned towards the spectator; when PEARL has ceased speaking there is a short pause; just then door R. is partly opened; MISS TUBBS cautiously puts out her head, withdrawing it again almost instantly and closing the door.*)

JOE (*thoughtfully; sitting back in the chair and putting his hands in his pockets*). Well, Pearl, that sounds like a fairy tale, and most people would call me a lucky dog, I know, but somehow I can't help feeling sorry!

SMITHKINS (*aside; excitedly*). Wh—wh—what is the young fool saying? he's sorry!—oh!

JOE. I was going to work so hard for you, dear, and make you be proud of your husband, and now you spring this on me. I declare I feel all flattened out!

SMITHKINS (*aside*). Work for her, was he? It's more than he ever did for me.

PEARL (*pouting*). You're not absolutely forced to marry me, you know. I could—

JOE (*seriously*). Hush!

PEARL (*running behind him and putting her arm about his neck*). Never mind, Joe! Don't let that nasty old money worry you. We can give it all away to some asylum.

SMITHKINS (*aside; disgustedly*). An asylum would be a better place for him than for your money.

JOE. Your aunt might have something to say about that. There, another thing! What will she say now to a stranger coming and asking her for her niece! Oh no—! I couldn't face her. She'd take me for a fortune hunter.

SMITHKINS (*aside*). I won't be able to keep my hands off him much longer!

PEARL. Above all things auntie wishes my happiness and I could never, never, never be happy with any man but you—do you hear? (*rumpling his hair in anything but a gentle manner*).

JOE. I'm glad of that.

PEARL. Oh! I nearly forgot. Joe, you're a lawyer. Have a look at the will. (*Crosses to the mantel*) Auntie slipped it back of this old clock for safe keeping. (*Searches but cannot find it; begins to look excited and frightened; lifts the different objects on the mantel; SMITHKINS is watching her every movement with breathless interest; JOE is sunk in a brown study; PEARL gives an exclamation of dismay*.) Joe, it is gone! Some one has stolen it!

JOE (*springing to his feet*). What under the sun is the matter? What has gone?

PEARL. The will! the will!

JOE. Are you sure you have looked thoroughly? (*Hunts about the mantel*.)

PEARL (*distractedly*). Yes, yes! It isn't there.

JOE (*looking about the floor*). What's this? (*Picks up the package lying on the table; examines it*.)

PEARL (*wringing her hands*). It isn't the will, that's all I know! Oh! oh! (*half crying*). This comes of my carelessness in leaving the door open. What shall I do?

JOE. What's this—a pair of stockings? (*Holds them up.*)

SMITHKINS (*aloud; frantically; staggering into the middle of the room*). A pair of stockings! Shades of the mighty Cæsar! I see it all! I've given the will to the woman in the bathrobe! Find her, Joe!—find her!

JOE. Father! You here! What under heaven does this mean?

PEARL (*aside*). His father!

SMITHKINS. It means that I'm a fool (*sinking into a chair*) and you're another! What are you standing there jabbering about? Find her, I say!

JOE. Find whom?

SMITHKINS. The woman in the bathrobe!

JOE (*appealing to PEARL*). Did you hear that?

PEARL. Oh, I think I know! He means Mrs. Norton. She was in showing me some of her purchases when the nurse came to tell her that the baby was ill. In her hurry she must have forgotten the stockings—but (*turning to SMITHKINS*) what has Mrs. Norton to do with the will?

SMITHKINS (*in a dead sort of voice*). Everything! Here, read this and then I'll explain. (*Produces the letter; JOE takes it and reads aloud.*)

PEARL (*indignantly*). Ballet-dancer, indeed! Your anonymous friend has gotten things slightly mixed. Mlle. Rosa lives in the flat above.

SMITHKINS. What! You are not a ballet-dancer!

PEARL. Sir! Do I look like one?

SMITHKINS. No, no! Not at all! (*Feebly.*) A drink!—somebody—a drink!

PEARL (*runs to the sideboard and pours some water into a glass*). Here is a glass of water.

SMITHKINS (*taking it*). Thanks! I feel ill enough even for that. (*Drinks.*)

JOE. And you've been hiding in this room all the morning.

SMITHKINS (*breathing hard and jerking out his words*). Couldn't help myself—You cornered me—this door was open—I—

PEARL. My carelessness has led to all this trouble!

SMITHKINS. If I hadn't gotten it here, I'd have gotten it somewhere else. I was looking for trouble this morning.

JOE. You've certainly found it! What about the will?

SMITHKINS (*jerking out his words*). Woman came to the door—nothing on but a bathrobe—said she was in a great hurry—wanted a pair of stockings that she had left in a package on the mantelpiece—I struck against a chair—upset things a bit—

JOE (*to PEARL*). See how you slandered that poor cat!

SMITHKINS. Saw no sign of the package on the mantel—finally in desperation I moved the clock, as I did so something fell to the floor—

PEARL (*excitedly*). A yellow envelope! (SMITHKINS *nods*.) Which you gave to Mrs. Norton thinking it belonged to her! (SMITHKINS *nods again*.) Just wait a minute. (PEARL *seizes the stockings and rushes from the room, calling out as she goes*) I'll make that all right and it won't take me long either! (*There is a short pause.*)

JOE (*somewhat uneasily*). I—I suppose you heard all the conversation that took place between PEARL and me? (SMITHKINS *nods*; *another short pause*) Ahem! Have you anything to say? (SMITHKINS *shakes his head*; *another short pause*.) Are you very angry? (SMITHKINS *shakes his head*; *another pause*.) PEARL's all right, isn't she? (SMITHKINS *nods*.)

PEARL (*joyfully rushing in, shaking aloft the yellow package*). Here it is! Mrs. Norton thought the exchange of packages was another of my practical jokes. So that mistake is rectified (*to SMITHKINS*). Please do not take it so much to heart. There is no harm done. We have had a bad scare, that is all.

SMITHKINS (*in a lifeless tone, as before*). No—that isn't all—there's more. Miss Tubbs—your aunt is mixed up in it, too.

PEARL. My aunt!

JOE. Father, do you mean to say that you are acquainted with Miss Tubbs?

SMITHKINS. Do you see that broken vase (*pointing in the direction of the sideboard*)? It was I who gave it to her—twenty years ago. (JOE and PEARL *exchange glances of astonishment*.) She came in here this morning—took me for a burglar and fainted (*pointing to door R.*). She's in that room now. (*To PEARL*.) Go and attend to her, child, but let me out of here first (*rises slowly to his feet*). Joe, give me my hat. I can never look her in the face again (*walks towards door C.*).

PEARL. Please don't go.

JOE. Surely, you will wait and give Miss Tubbs some explanation?

MISS TUBBS (*advancing from room R.*). Josiah, stay!

SMITHKINS (*turning quickly, his face radiant*). Jane Ann!
(*They rush into each other's arms.*)

JOE. Pearl!

PEARL. Joe! (*They also embrace.*)

MISS TUBBS. I, also, was playing eavesdropper; and thought at first I could make nothing out of the muddle, I think that now I begin to understand.

SMITHKINS (*with a tender glance*). And you'll forgive me for the sake of "Auld lang syne?"

MISS TUBBS. Yes, and for your own sake (*returning his glance*).

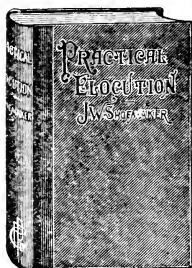
SMITHKINS. And what about these children? (*pointing to JOE and PEARL who are standing hand in hand*).

MISS TUBBS. I think Pearl is the luckiest of girls (*kissing her*). And as for Joe (*taking his hand in both of hers*), he will always be dear to me, if for no other reason than because he is his father's son.

CURTAIN

(*If a funny ending is desired, the song and dance may again be introduced.*)

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